

Study of USPS statistics suggests working in high temperatures leads to more harassment and discrimination

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An economist at Harvard University has found that on hot days, people working for the U.S. Postal Service are more likely to harass a colleague

or discriminate against them. In her paper published in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, Ayushi Narayana describes her analysis of Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) reports made by people working for USPS and compared them with weather data to learn more about behavior changes during hot days.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that people grow a little more cranky than usual when engaging in activities outside on a hot day. Prior research has also shown that hot weather can lead to [aggressive behavior](#) and social unrest. Noting that the planet is heating up, Narayana wondered what impact it might have on people who have to work outside or in facilities with no air cooling.

To gain some perspective on the issue, she gained access to EEOC infraction reports filled out by employees of the USPS—a workforce made up of a large percentage of people who have to work outside no matter the [weather conditions](#). She then charted reports describing harassment and/or discrimination over time. Next, she obtained [weather data](#) for the period of time covered by the EEOC reports. By plotting temperatures along with the number of EEOC complaints, she was able to see that the number of reports increased on extremely [hot days](#)—by approximately 5%.

For her study, Narayana, labeled days that exceeded 32 degrees Celsius (approximately 90 degrees Fahrenheit) as extreme heat days. She noted that the increase in EEOC harassment reports were independent of location and were not related to a specific type, such as gender, and neither were the reports of discrimination types. She also noted that her data showed that there was not simply an increase in reports made on hot days, but actual increases in the number of behavioral events that led to the reports.

Narayana concludes by suggesting that employers would be wise to take

note of the expected warmer climate coming in the years ahead to make adjustments to working conditions to prevent increases in EEOC infractions.

More information: Ayushi Narayan, The impact of extreme heat on workplace harassment and discrimination, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (2022). [DOI: 10.1073/pnas.2204076119](https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2204076119)

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